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Statement submitted by Comité français pour l'Afrique du Sud, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Developing public services in the areas of education, housing and health during a crisis

The global economic crisis is affecting more severely persons in a precarious situation and may reduce the direct and indirect assistance given to them by States. Civil society has an important role to play during the current crisis to ensure that the goals of equitable development are maintained.

The participation of civil society has been recognized and supported by the United Nations since its creation in 1945. It is a major element of social progress. Civil society functions at two levels. In the first place, by reminding States of their obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights towards precarious populations, particularly as regards education, housing and health care. In the second place, civil society organizations provide direct assistance to people in need, supplementing government action.

Firstly, non-profit associations provide encouragement to the missions incumbent on States. It is essential that State public services should during a crisis continue to promote the smooth operation of education systems and protection mechanisms in the areas of health and housing, in order to provide safeguards for the poorest inhabitants. The European Union has recognized the role of public services, which are essential to maintaining equitable development, particularly in times of economic crisis.

The role of civil society is to ensure that public service infrastructures exist so that all can enjoy basic economic and social rights.

Secondly, to the extent possible, the components of civil society intervene by directly meeting the vital needs of populations in a precarious situation, when a State is unable to deal with the most difficult situations on its own.

Obviously a useful complementarity exists between States and civil society organizations in the process of equitable development. In this regard, South Africa is an example of nongovernmental organizations working together with the State to achieve a goal of social justice, so that all can have access to education, decent housing and adequate health care, especially as regards HIV/Aids.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize the priority nature of the investments to be made in public services in the area of education, housing and health, in order to deal with the consequences of the economic crisis. Civil society inherently promotes such an approach.